

VZCZCXR07261

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #1094/01 1131148

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 231148Z APR 09

FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2814

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001094

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL I2

SUBJECT: NAJAF STILL AWAITS ELECTION OF NEXT PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor John G. Fox for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a PRT Najaf cable.

¶1. (C) Summary. We continue to await the selection of a new Governor, his two Deputies, and a host of security and provincial government appointees. Despite initial optimism that negotiations had concluded, local personality conflicts, provincial - central party squabbles and the inclusion of the once-dominant Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) back into the Najaf coalition set matters back several weeks. Violence, questions about the future of the Provincial Police, and a general feeling of insecurity and concern plague the province as the political situation remains open and contentious. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) In numerous conversations and meetings over the past three weeks, PRT Officers discussed the development of the Najaf political negotiations with former ISCI Governor Asaad Abu Gelal, Deputy Governor Abdul Hussein Abtan, State of Law re-elected PC member Sheikh Fayed al Shimmeri, Independent Union of Najaf leader Zuhair Sharba, members of their staffs, other former and incoming PC members, and contacts of Locally Engaged Staff political assistants representing all of the winning Najaf political entities. Week One (April 5-11): The "State of Law Five"; ISCI excluded

-----  
¶3. (C) Through Da,wa State of Law Provincial Council members, Governor Asaad, and Independent Union spokesman Zuhair Sharba, PRT Officers learned that Maliki had secured the support of three of the six local political lists with seats on the PC, including the Maliki-affiliated State of Law, former Governor Adnan al Zurfi,s Loyalty to Najaf, and former PM Jaafari,s Reform Trend, and that he had eventually allied with the Sadrists Free Trend and Independent Union of Najaf PC members as well, for a total of 21 of 28 total seats. ISCI,s Martyrs of the Mihrab seven seats, led by former Deputy Governor Abtan, began to openly admit defeat and began to refine their strategy as the Najaf opposition party.

¶4. (C) For a brief period before the Sadrists and Independents joined the Maliki coalition, outgoing Deputy Governor Asaad, when several contacts, including the Governor himself, informed us that Maliki had settled on current Governor Asaad Abu Gelal as his choice to remain Governor. According to Governor Asaad, Maliki wanted to bring ISCI back into the Najaf political fold by choosing a moderate and independent ISCI member. Many contacts speculated and widely assumed that Maliki was playing a larger game to secure ISCI,s inclusion within a larger Shia political movement and that his office was willing to make concessions to ISCI in South-Central Iraq in order to achieve this goal. Governor Asaad, though occasionally feigning reluctance in meeting with PRT officers to accept another term, proved willing to continue on.

¶7. (C) ISCI,s core, led in Najaf by Deputy Governor Abtan, had no desire to allow Governor Asaad to live on politically as an ISCI apostate and vociferously denounced

the idea that his selection was favored by ISCI in the Najaf provincial government. Abtan's position was that only he and his prominent vote-getting position at the top of the ISCI list could count as meaningful ISCI representation. The Asaad -Abtan feud witnessed by the PRT over the last several months in the Governance Center had thus suddenly resurfaced as a political obstacle to seating the Najaf government. Sheikh Fayed told the PRT, &if Asaad is not accepted as Governor, we will have to start from the beginning and redraw the entire political map for the province.<sup>8</sup>

Week Three (April 19-23): The Sadrists Re-Emerge

¶8. (C) Following the breakdown of negotiations caused by the intramural ISCI feud, rumor and whim began to circulate among top negotiators. New names for Governor were bruited almost daily. The parties were preoccupied with electing the Council's leadership, and hoped to do this in coordination with the selection of the Governor and Deputy Governor in order to negotiate on as broad a board as possible. At length, Sheikh Fayed al Shimmeri, top State of Law negotiator and PC member, was elected Council Chairman and Khudair Al Jaburi, Independent Union of Najaf candidate and major of Manathera district, became his deputy.

¶9. (C) Meanwhile, the Loyalty to Najaf list, headed by Ministry of Interior intelligence official and former CPA governor of Najaf Adnan al Zurfi, was making a strong play for Governor, either for Zurfi himself or for popular Kufa academician Dr. Nizar Al Nafakh. The strongest players, however, became the Sadrists again and their six Free Trend seats. With Da,wa perceived to have already received a power position (the PC Chairmanship), the Sadrists began a campaign either to snag the governorship for themselves or, failing that, to emerge as the kingmaker for the job. And there the matter stands.

¶10. (C) Comment: Once perceived as holding almost all of the cards as a result of his victory in the provincial election, Maliki's influence appears to have waned in the last week as a result of his failure to broker an efficient compromise after the election. The local Da,wa list publicly released a letter condemning Maliki's selection of an ISCI associate for Governor. Sheikh Fayed and the State of Law crowd still believe the Governor's position to be rightfully theirs. Anything is still possible, from a Sadrast Governor to a relooking at Governor Asaad ) or even Abtan ) to an outsider such as Sadiq al Laban appointed at the last moment. PRT Officers have ensured open lines of communication with all party leaders except the Sadrists and are prepared to instantly engage whoever emerges victorious.

END COMMENT.

BUTENIS